

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MPOL NATO UK
SUBJECT: HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATE ON THE ROYAL NAVY,
19 MAY 1977

1. THE DEBATE ON THE ROYAL NAVY WAS OPENED FOR THE
OPPOSITION BY WINSTON CHURCHILL, A CONSERVATIVE DEFENSE
SPOKESMAN. FOR THE GOVERNMENT, PATRICK DUFFY, PARLIA-
MENTARY UNDER SECRETARY FOR THE NAVY, REPLIED. CHURCHILL
IN KEEPING WITH HIS NOW WELL ESTABLISHED FORM ATTACKED
THE GOVERNMENT ON ITS POLICY OF CUTTING BACK ON
DEFENSE EXPENDITURE. FOR THE ROYAL NAVY, THE GOVERN-
MENT'S "MAGINOT LINE" PHILOSOPHY MEANT THAT BRITAIN'S
VITAL SEA LINES OF COMMUNICATION ARE LESS WELL DEFENDED
TODAY THAN THEY WERE A DECADE AGO. YET, CHURCHILL
EMPHASIZED, THE THREAT POSED BY SOVIET NAVAL AND AIR
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POWER HAD GROWN SUBSTANTIALLY OVER THIS PERIOD.
CHURCHILL SAID THE SOVIET SUBMARINE THREAT TO THE UK IS
PARTICULARLY GREAT, NOTING THAT THEIR SUBMARINE FLEET IS
FAR THE LARGEST IN THE WORLD AND THREE TIMES THAT OF THE
US. THE ROYAL NAVY, CHURCHILL SAID, HAD TAKEN A HEAVY
TOLL BECAUSE OF DEFENSE CUTS AND NAVY TRAINING AND WAR
STOCKS HAVE BEEN REDUCED "TO A DESPERATELY LOW LEVEL."

2. CHURCHILL SUPPORTED STRONGLY THE GOVERNMENT'S SPENDING ON POLARIS MODERNIZATION. HE ARGUED IT IS IMPORTANT THAT IN THE "OVERALL DETERRENT STRATEGY OF THE ALLIANCE THERE SHOULD BE MORE THAN ONE DECISION-MAKING CENTER." CHURCHILL URGED THAT THE UK SHOULD GIVE CONSIDERATION TO DEVELOPING OR ACQUIRING A CRUISE MISSILE SYSTEM "...WHICH COULD BE DEPLOYED IN ATTACK SUBMARINES."

3. CHURCHILL CALLED FOR AN INCREASE IN DEFENSE EXPENDITURES IN REAL TERMS. "TO DO LESS IS A BREACH OF FAITH WITH (BRITAIN'S) ALLIES." HE SAID THE PRICE OF DETERRENCE IS HIGH BUT THE PRICE OF FAILURE TO DETER WOULD BE "IMMEASURABLE."

4. TOUCHING ON THE NATO DPC MEETING, CHURCHILL SUPPORTED THE CALL FOR A 3 PERCENT INCREASE IN DEFENSE SPENDING IN REAL TERMS. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THERE MUST BE "CONCERN" THAT A RIDER HAD HAD TO BE INSERTED "AT THE REQUEST OF OUR OWN DEFENSE SECRETARY" THAT ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD AFFECT WHAT COULD BE ACHIEVED. "I HOPE THIS IS NOT SO AND THAT HE WILL NOT PLEAD THAT THE RESOURCES CANNOT BE FOUND TO MEET OUR FAIR SHARE OF THAT COMMITMENT."

5. DUFFY, REPLYING TO THE DEBATE, SAID THE ROYAL NAVY'S REEQUIPMENT AND MODERNIZATION PLANS ARE CONTINUING ALTHOUGH HE RECOGNIZED THAT CUTS HAD AFFECTED THE NAVY'S SPENDING. DUFFY NOTED THAT THE ROYAL NAVY CONTINUED TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PARTICIPATE IN THE NAVAL ON-CALL FORCE FOR THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND HAD DONE SO IN TWO NATO EXERCISES THIS YEAR.

6. DUFFY SAID THE ROYAL NAVY IS CONTINUING ITS EFFORT, IN CONCERT WITH ALLIES, TO ACHIEVE "THE MAXIMUM PRACTICAL LEVELS" OF STANDARDIZATION AND INTEROPERABILITY OF EQUIPMENT. ALSO, HE NOTED THAT THE ROYAL NAVY AND RAF HAD "COPED WELL" WITH THE POLICING OF THE UK'S NEW 200 MILES FISHERIES LIMITS, SAYING HE BELIEVED THE UK HAD "THE RIGHT COMBINATION" OF SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT. NIMRODS CONTRIBUTED ENORMOUSLY TO "THE ECONOMIC, EFFECTIVE AND TIMELY" DEPLOYMENT OF SHIPS.

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